

the new WebJunction

designing an initiative for user engagement

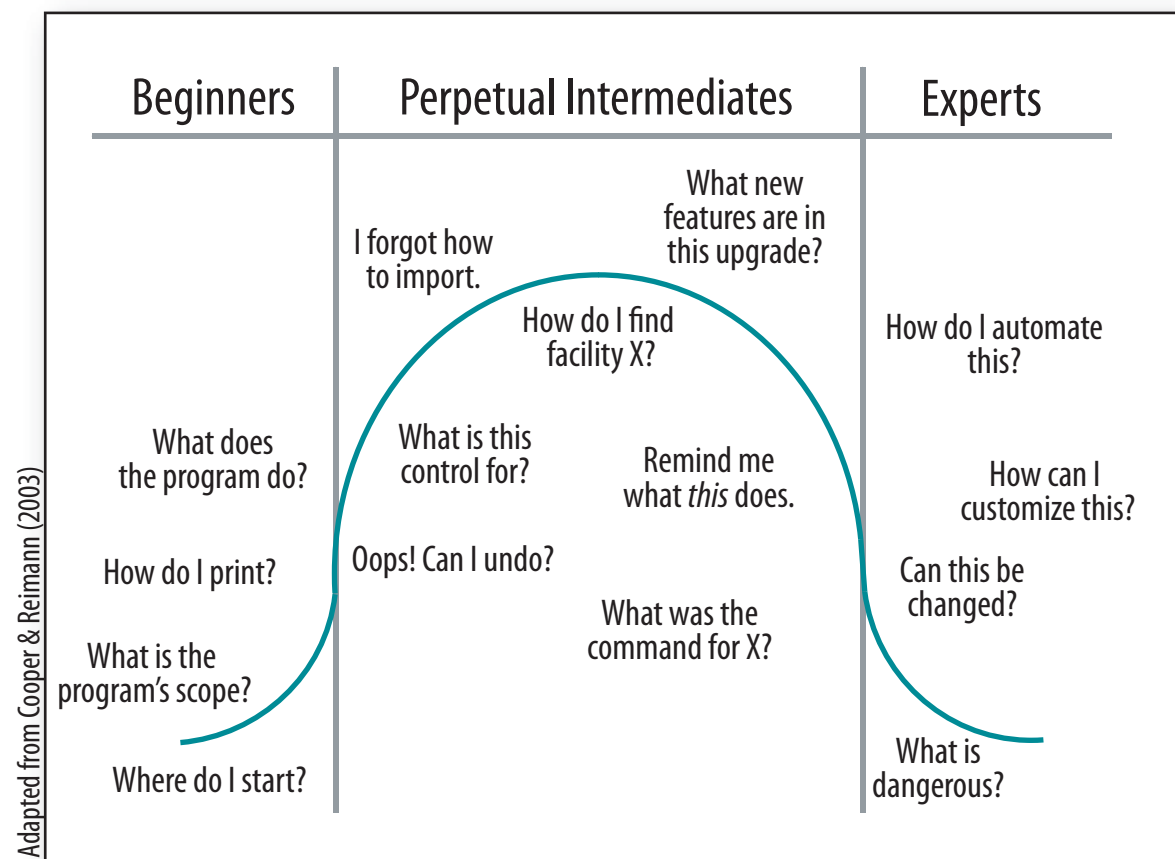
BACKGROUND

Launched in 2003, WebJunction is a national online portal for information, resources, and community spaces serving library professionals. After five years of building a thriving site and loyal user base, WebJunction is currently entering into a new stage of growth with an overhaul of existing services. This relaunch will introduce an entirely new technology platform with fresh features, a dramatically different interface design, and extensive improvements in social networking capabilities.

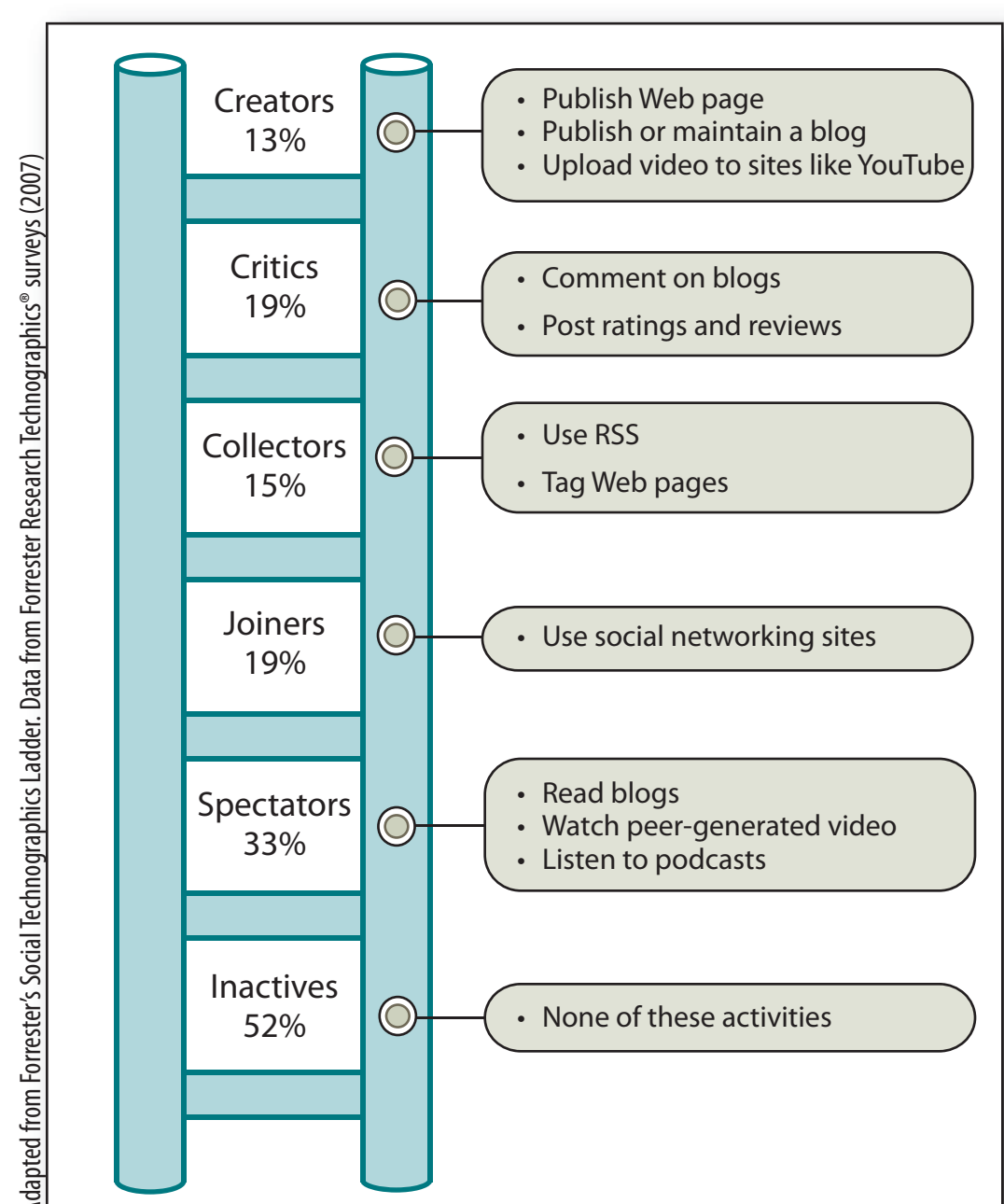
INFORMATION PROBLEM

The key to successfully nurturing a virtual community of practice is providing a platform that invites and supports its distributed members, and the new WebJunction has been designed to meet this need. My project addresses the problem of orienting users to the new space while maintaining the liveliness of their community.

While gathering business requirements from stakeholders, preliminary research revealed insights into needs and patterns of technology users. Findings framed the initial stages of my brainstorming and also informed subsequent design decisions.



Cooper and Reimann's (2003) continuum demonstrates the spectrum of needs as a user moves along a bell curve of experience levels. Although all WebJunction users will be beginners to the new site, some have had experience with the features in other web contexts. Others will not have experienced the features in any context. Therefore, user engagement must be encouraged according to different needs and levels of experience.



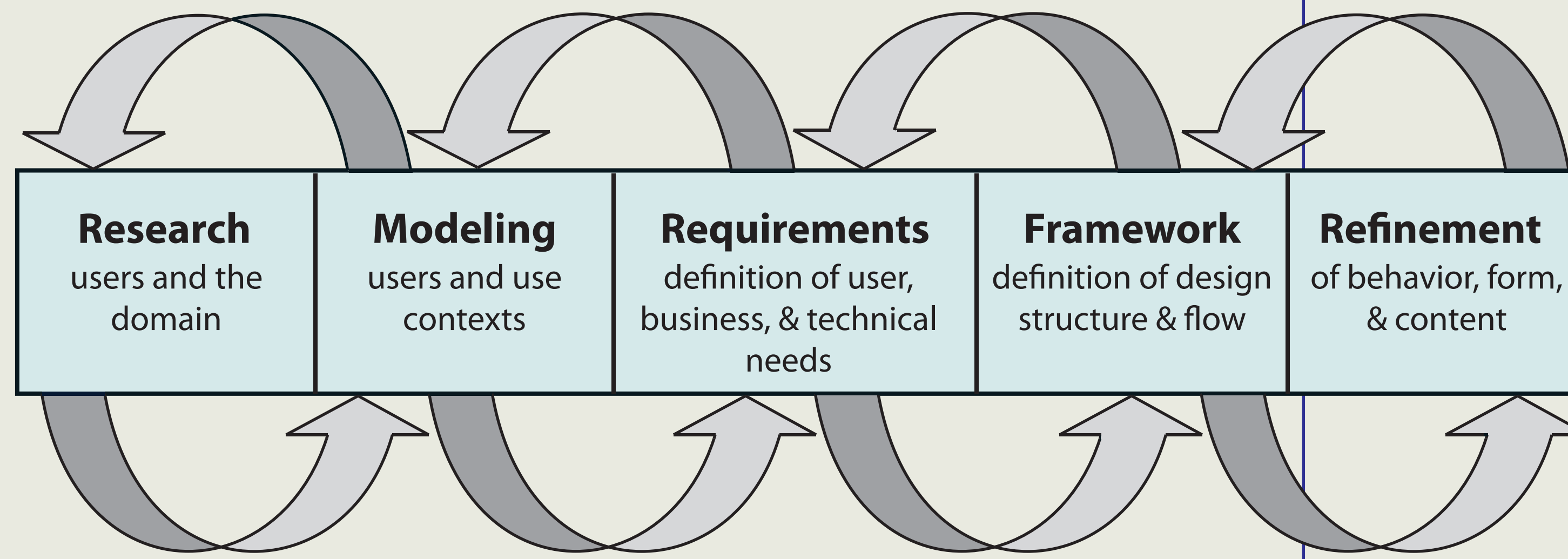
Forrester's Social Technographics Ladder (2007) illustrates the scale of user participation with social software. A diversity of roles is optimal for creating community vibrancy. User-contributed content is an enhanced feature on the new site, but to fully complement accountability and variety in opinion, *Critics* are able to voice opinions. *Collectors* enhance overall findability with tagging features, while the

largest active population (*Spectators*) are primary agents for carrying knowledge beyond the walls of the virtual community space into the public domain.

METHODOLOGY

Goal-Directed Design

Cooper & Reimann, 2003



My project was focused on creating optimal processes for imparting information about new WebJunction features to the audience. This user-centric nature of the business problem necessitated a design methodology rooted in human-computer interaction principles. I selected Cooper's goal-directed design process because it balances business requirements with the needs and goals of users (2003). This process typifies user-centered design in that it prioritizes the audience of a product with user modeling. Extensive qualitative and quantitative user research is only valuable if its output is rendered in an intelligible format. Goal-directed design meets this need with a method for organizing and communicating raw data through user personas.

USER ANALYSIS

In order to create personas as a reliable tool for making design decisions, gathering data from disparate sources is an important step in the modeling process. This is crucial for creating functionality that is designed based on the goals and needs of actual users. After gathering a substantial amount of data, I compiled meaningful bits into a *discovery document* for analysis (Wodtke, 2002). As I took notes, I observed patterns in demographics, goals, motivators, pain points, and current usage of WebJunction. Two archetypes emerged from the data and from there I developed Rosa and Felix, my primary and secondary personas, respectively.

Data Sources

- Stakeholder interviews
- SME interviews
- 2007 WebJunction Member Survey results
- WebJunction Discussion Boards
- Usability tests
- Web analytics
- Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2008-09 Edition, Librarians. <http://www.bls.gov/oco/print/ocos068.htm>

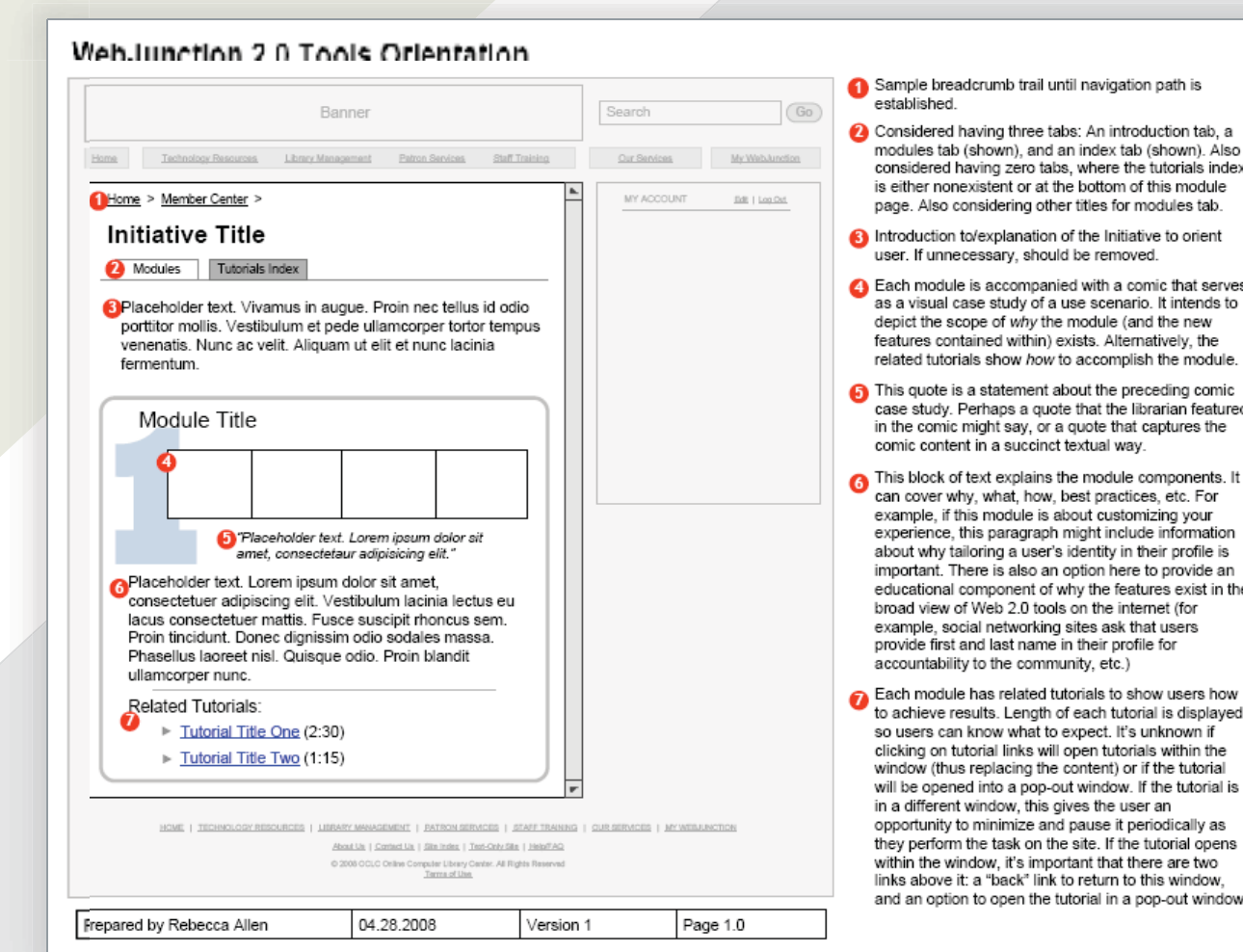
DESIGN GOALS

Amassing preliminary research and business requirements with user research revealed design opportunities according to varying technographic factors. In order to effectively provide transition support to users through the change, my project needed to:

- Demonstrate the added value of using the new system.
- Initiate a mental model for the scope of engagement possibilities with features.
- Provide step-by-step guidance for accomplishing tasks.
- Encourage the development of a customized, self-directed experience through exploration and discovery.

SOLUTION

The resulting design, documented in wireframes, consists of learning modules that serve as pathways to selected user experiences. Each module includes an overview, illustration, and tutorials.



THE OVERVIEW provides scope information on the purpose and benefits of using the tools.

THE ILLUSTRATION component features a comic that renders the workflow with caricatures of users and (attempted) humor. Comics are increasingly becoming recognized as a powerful method for communicating design functionality. According to McCloud (1993), comics have the ability to absorb the reader's identity: "We don't just observe the cartoon, we become it!" Utilizing comics in my solution can help pull users inside the workflow so they personally identify with potential use-case scenarios.

THE TUTORIALS are screen capture videos that break down tasks related to each workflow. They provide procedural information for users that have graduated past the needs of beginners.

NEXT STEPS

The new WebJunction will feature a platform that supports spontaneous participation and encourages user definition of processes, so development of the site will be ongoing. As the community evolves, WebJunction will evolve with it. It remains to be seen how users will find new and unique ways to customize their experiences in the newly established infrastructure.

- User testing and subsequent refinement.
- Implementation.
- Extend and revise modules as new features are added and use scenarios defined.

References

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